DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 297 216 CG 020 990

AUTHOR Carducci, Bernardo J.; Stein, Nikki D.
TITLE The Personal and Situational Pervasiveness of Shyness in College Students: A Nine-Year Comparison.
PUB DATE Mar 88
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Psychological Association (34th, New Orleans, LA, March 31-April 2, 1988).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Students; Higher Education; *Interpersonal Competence; *Personality Traits; *Self Concept; *Student Attitudes; Trend Analysis
IDENTIFIERS *Shyness

ABSTRACT

Previous studies on shyness have focused on a limited number of individuals at a particular point in time. This study assessed the extent to which shyness was experienced by college students (N=1,120) in their daily lives and compared trends in such experiences across groups over a 9-year period. Each year from 1979 to 1987, with the exception of 1986, students completed a survey on shyness assessing their cognitive, affective, and situational reactions to the experiences of shyness in their daily lives. The results indicated that almost one-half of the students surveyed considered themselves to be shy. This pattern of results also seemed to remain stable over the 9-year period. Slightly over 55% of students indicated that shyness was a personal problem for them. Situations most often associated with eliciting feelings of shyness included those involving strangers, authorities, and members of the opposite sex. The results suggest that shyness is a rather pervasive phenomenon that is considered problematic and undesirable by most individuals who consider themselves shy. Most shy respondents, however, believed that their shyness could be overcome and were willing to work seriously to overcome it. A number of treatment programs are available to help individuals overcome shyness, most of which are designed to improve the individual's interpersonal skills. (NB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED297216

Paper presented at the meeting of the Southeastern Psychological Association, New Orleans, April 1988

The Personal and Situational Pervasiveness of Shyness in College Students: A Nine-Year Comparison

Bernardo J. Carducci Nikki D. Stein

Indiana University Southeast

CS 020990

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

- This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- ☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Bernardo J. Carducci
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Address all correspondence to Bernardo J. Carducci, Department of Psychology, Indiana University Southeast, New Albany, IN 47150

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The Personal and Situational Pervasiveness of Shyness in College Students: A Nine-Year Comparison

Previous surveys on shyness (cf. Zimbardo, 1977) and research on the dynamics and treatment of shyness (cf. Jones, Cheek, & Briggs, 1986) have focused on a limited number of individuals at a particular point in time. While such specific information has added to our understanding of shyness, it does not make it possible to determine more global and temporal trends in shyness. The purpose of the present study is to assess the extent to which shyness is experienced by students in their daily lives and compare trends in such experiences across groups over a nine-year period.

Methods

The subjects were 1120 male and female college students ranging in age from 17 to 61 from both day and evening classes of introductory psychology. Each year from 1979 to 1987, with the exception of 1986, students in class sizes ranging from 35 to 85 completed a survey on shyness assessing their cognitive (e.g., Compared to others, how shy are you?), affective (e.g., Is your shyness a personal problem for you?), and situational (e.g., Types of people who make you feel shy) reactions to the experiences of shyness in their daily lives. The responses for each year were assessed from at least two different psychology classes.

Results

Personal Pervasiveness of Shyness

The results presented in Table 1 indicate that almost half of the college students surveyed consider themselves to be shy. While such a percentage may seem rather high, it is quite consistent with the 40 percent reported by Zimbardo (1977) in his early surveys on shyness. The pattern of results also seems to remain stable over the nine-year period. The somewhat chronic nature of shyness is suggested by the results in Table 2 where 44.2 percent of the individuals who presently considered themselves to be shy report that they have always been shy. Table 3 indicates that in comparison to their peers, 27.7 percent of the shy individuals consider themselves to be more shy than their peers while 26.7 percent considered themselves to less shy.

Insert Tables 1, 2, & 3 about here

The frequency of which shy individuals experience shyness is presented in Table 4. Inspection of these results indicate that shyness is most often experienced on a weekly basis, with slightly over 20 percent of the students indicating they experience shyness on an almost daily basis. The frequency of which shyness is a personal problem to the students is presented in Table 5. Slightly over 55 percent of the students indicated that shyness was a personal problem for them, with almost 10 percent saying it was often a problem with them. And, although there are some benefits associated with being shy (e.g.,

appearing discreet and seriously introspective), the results presented in Table 6 indicate that only 2.2 percent of the college students surveyed rated being shy as desirable, while 60 percent rated it as being undesirable. All of these patterns of results seem to be rather consistent across the nine-year period.

Insert Tables 4, 5, & 6 about here

Situational Pervasiveness of Shyness

Table 7 summarizes the extent to which the students felt shy in different situations. Consistent with previous research (Zimbardo, 1977), those situations most often associated with eliciting feelings of shyness include those involving strangers, authorities, and members of the opposite sex. The nature of this pattern of results was consistent across the nine-year period.

Insert Table 7 about here

The results in Table 8 indicate that over two thirds of the students felt that their shyness was something that could be overcome and, as seen in Table 9, over 77 percent indicated that they would be willing to work seriously at overcoming it. These patterns of results were observed to be consistent across the nine-year period.

Insert Table 8 & 9 about here

Discussion

The results of the present survey on shyness are quite consistent with the pioneering work done by Zimbardo and his associates (Zimbardo 1977; Zimbardo, Pilkonis, and Norwood, 1974). The results also indicate that the pervasiveness of shyness has remained relatively stable over the nine-year period investigated in the present study and over the 14 years since the original surveys on shyness were conducted.

While the present results, along with previous results, indicate that shyness is a rather common and problematic phenomenon for many college students, a majority of them indicated that they would be willing to work seriously to overcome it. The first step in overcoming shyness is to identify those situations that seem to elicit it. In the present study, strangers, authorities, and interacting with members of the opposite sex were identified as situations frequently eliciting shyness in students.

One significant aspect of the fact that shyness is triggered by authorities, either by their knowledge or their role, is that college professors fall into this category. The implication is that by making students feel shy, such students may fail to obtain the assistance they may need with their studies by not

asking questions during the class or seeking the professor out after class for personal assistance. Such individuals may also be hindering their career aspirations by being to shy too ask authorities to write them letters of reference. To help minimize the possibility of teachers eliciting shyness in their students, Friedman (1980) offers the following guidelines:

1. Teachers should encourage and provide opportunities for oral presentation.
2. Teachers should indicate that they welcome and value all students' comments.
3. Teachers and students should admit to errors when they are made. Teachers need to encourage this among their students by creating a classroom atmosphere in which errors are not ridiculed.
4. Students should be encouraged to relate what they say to what others in the class have said.
5. Classroom discussion should be among students as well as between teacher and students.

To help shy individual cope with the shyness elicited by strangers and members of the opposite sex in interpersonal settings, a number of treatment programs have been suggested, including altering self-perceptions (Butler, 1981), assertiveness training (Alberti & Emmons, 1986), modeling social skills (Wassmer, 1978), and cognitive modification (Haynes-Clements & Avery, 1984). However, the interpersonal process training

approach incorporates many of these techniques into a support group program involving four basic steps (Alden & Cappe, 1986). First, clients are taught relaxation techniques. The second step involves clients arranging problematic social situations into a hierarchical manner according to the level of fear produced. In the third step of the program, various interaction skills, including active listening, empathic responding, communicating respect for others' opinions, and self-disclosure, are introduced and discussed. The therapist demonstrates how each skill might be useful in various situations. Clients then practice with the therapist the interaction skills, beginning with those situations posing the least difficulty. Finally, the clients then select social situations to encounter in vivo and report back to the group how they adapted the interaction skills to their situations and the results obtained. Feedback and social support are provided by group discussion.

In summary, shyness seems to be a rather pervasive phenomenon that is considered problematic and undesirable by most individuals who consider themselves to be shy. Fortunately, most individuals who consider themselves shy believe that their shyness can be overcome and are willing to work seriously to overcome it. For these individuals, a number of treatment programs are available., most of which are designed to improve the individual's interpersonal skills.

References

Alberti, R. E., & Emmons, M. L. (1986). Your perfect right. San Luis Obispo, CA: Impact Publishers.

Alden, L. & Cappe, R. (1986). Interpersonal process training for shy clients. In W. H. Jones, J. M. Cheek, & S. R. Briggs (Eds.), Shyness: Perspectives on research and treatment (pp. 343-355). New York: Plenum Press.

Butler, P. E. (1981). Talking to yourself. San Francisco: Harper& Row, Publishers.

Friedman, P. G. (1980). Shyness and reticence in students. Washington, D.C.: National Education Association.

Haynes-Clements, L. A., & Avery, A. W. (1984). A cognitive-behavioral approach to social skills training with shy individuals. Journal of Clinical Psychology, 40, 710-713.

Jones, W. H., Cheek, J. M., & Briggs, S. R. (Eds.). (1986). Shyness: Perspectives on research and treatment. New York: Plenum Press.

Wassmer, A. C. (1978). Making contact: A guide to overcoming shyness, making new relationships, and keeping those you already have. New York: The Dial Press.

Zimbardo, P. G. (1977). Shyness: What it is, what to do about it. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

Zimbardo, P. G., Pilkonis, P. A., & Norwood, R. M. (1974). The silent prison of shyness. (ONR Tech. Rep. Z-17). Stanford, CA: Stanford University.

Table 1

Percentage Considering Themselves to be a Shy Person

	Year								
	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1987	Overall
Yes	49.3	49.7	46.9	45.0	51.3	58.9	48.9	46.6	49.6
No	50.7	50.3	53.1	55.0	48.8	41.1	51.1	53.4	50.4
Sample size	134	179	81	160	80	141	229	116	1120

Table 2

Percentage of Shy Individuals Indicating They Have Always Been Shy

	Year								
	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1987	Overall
Yes	44.8	43.6	38.3	39.4	45.0	52.5	45.4	42.2	44.2
No	3.0	7.3	8.6	5.6	6.3	6.4	6.6	4.3	6.0
No response*	52.2	49.2	53.1	55.0	48.8	41.1	48.0	53.4	49.8
Sample size	134	179	81	160	80	141	229	116	1120

*Individuals who do not consider themselves shy did not respond to this question.

Table 3

Percentage Indicating Their Shyness Compared to Their Peers

	Year								
	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1987	Overall
Much more shy	1.5	2.2	0.0	1.9	3.8	1.4	3.5	3.4	2.3
More shy	26.1	30.2	9.9	28.8	27.5	27.0	25.3	19.8	25.4
About as shy	29.9	31.8	42.0	30.0	38.8	39.7	37.1	31.9	34.6
Less shy	22.4	16.2	21.0	16.9	17.5	17.7	16.2	25.0	18.6
Much less shy	8.2	5.6	16.0	8.8	6.3	7.1	7.0	10.3	8.1
No response*	11.9	14.0	11.1	13.8	6.3	7.1	10.9	9.5	11.0
Sample size	134	179	81	160	80	141	229	116	1120

*Individuals who do not consider themselves shy did not respond to this question.

Table 4

Percentage Indicating How Often They Feel Shy

	Year								
	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1987	Overall
Everyday	8.2	5.6	3.7	5.0	7.5	3.5	5.7	6.9	5.7
Almost every day	14.2	17.9	11.1	14.4	16.3	16.3	13.5	12.1	14.6
Often, nearly every other day	8.2	11.2	11.1	12.5	11.3	13.	14.4	12.1	12.1
One or two times a week	18.7	21.8	25.9	22.5	27.5	27.0	18.8	18.1	21.9
Occasionally, less than once a week	26.9	16.2	17.3	15.6	22.5	23.4	21.4	26.7	21.0
Rarely, once a month or less	11.9	13.4	17.3	15.6	7.5	9.2	15.3	14.7	13.4
No response*	11.9	14.0	13.6	14.4	7.5	7.1	10.9	9.5	11.3
Sample size	134	179	81	160	80	141	229	116	1120

*Individuals who do not consider themselves shy did not respond to this question.

Table 5

Percentage Indicating Shyness is a Personal Problem for Them

	Year								
	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1987	Overall
Yes, often	9.7	13.4	3.7	3.8	13.8	6.4	10.0	14.7	9.5
Yes, sometimes	18.7	22.9	19.8	21.3	25.0	14.9	21.4	14.7	19.9
Yes, occasionally	29.9	24.0	22.2	30.0	16.3	27.7	27.9	24.1	26.2
Rarely	24.6	15.6	30.9	22.5	27.5	27.7	21.0	27.6	23.5
Never	5.2	10.1	12.3	8.1	8.2	15.6	8.7	9.5	9.8
No response*	11.9	14.0	11.1	14.4	6.3	7.8	10.9	9.5	11.2
Sample size	134	179	81	160	80	141	229	116	1120

*Individuals who do not consider themselves shy did not respond to this question.

Table 6

Percentage Indicating the Desirability of Their Shyness

	Year								
	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1987	Overall
Very undesirable	1.5	8.9	11.1	10.6	18.8	14.2	18.3	19.8	12.9
Undesirable	53.0	50.8	49.4	50.0	45.0	48.2	40.2	42.2	47.1
Neither	32.1	24.6	24.7	23.8	26.3	27.7	27.5	28.4	26.9
Desirable	1.5	1.7	3.7	1.9	2.5	2.1	2.6	0.0	2.0
Very desirable	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.3	0.0	.4	0.0	.2
No response*	11.9	14.0	11.1	13.8	6.3	7.8	10.9	9.5	11.0
Sample size	134	179	81	160	80	141	229	116	1120

*Individuals who do not consider themselves shy did not respond to this question.

Table 7

Percentage Indicating Who Makes Them Feel Shy

Situation	Year								Over-all
	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1987	
My parents	2.2	4.5	1.2	5.0	3.8	5.7	4.8	6.9	4.5
My siblings (brothers and/or sisters)	1.5	2.8	1.2	3.1	1.3	1.4	1.7	3.4	2.1
Other relatives	14.2	13.4	11.1	3.1	3.8	5.7	4.4	2.6	7.2
Friends	3.0	11.2	8.6	7.5	16.3	8.5	8.7	9.5	8.8
Strangers	62.7	59.8	58.0	66.3	68.8	75.9	67.7	65.5	65.8
Foreigners	12.7	12.3	13.6	15.0	21.3	19.1	12.2	11.2	14.2
Authorities (by virtue of their knowledge--intellectual superiors, experts)	47.8	48.0	42.0	48.8	47.5	46.8	42.4	49.1	46.4
Elderly people (much older than you)	7.5	10.1	8.6	10.0	8.8	8.5	5.7	9.5	8.4
Children (much younger than you)	1.5	2.2	1.2	1.3	3.8	2.1	2.6	4.3	2.3
Persons of the opposite sex, in a group	32.1	40.8	48.1	43.1	37.5	38.3	39.3	44.0	40.1
Persons of the opposite sex, one-to-one	26.9	33.5	34.6	41.3	42.5	42.6	37.6	40.5	37.2
A person of the same sex, one-to-one	5.2	8.4	3.7	5.6	12.5	9.2	6.1	9.5	7.3
Authorities (by virtue of their role--police, teacher, superior at work)	39.6	39.7	34.6	40.0	37.5	40.4	29.3	39.7	37.1
Sample size	134	179	81	160	80	141	229	116	1120

Table 8

Percentage Who Think Their Shyness Can Be Overcome

	Year								
	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1987	Overall
Yes	66.4	62.6	74.1	65.6	66.3	76.6	71.2	73.3	69.2
No	3.0	5.6	1.2	2.5	2.5	2.8	1.7	.9	2.7
Uncertain	17.2	15.1	13.6	17.5	25.0	11.3	14.0	14.7	15.5
No response*	13.4	16.8	11.1	14.4	6.3	9.2	13.1	11.2	12.6
Sample size	134	179	81	160	80	141	229	116	1120

*Individuals who do not consider themselves shy did not respond to this question.

Table 9

Percentage of Those Willing to Work Seriously at Overcoming Shyness

	Year								
	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1987	Overall
Yes, definitely	50.0	46.4	53.1	50.0	47.5	46.1	46.3	46.6	47.9
Yes, perhaps	26.9	22.3	23.5	30.0	27.5	34.0	31.9	35.3	29.2
Not sure yet	6.7	6.1	6.2	3.1	11.3	9.9	8.3	6.9	7.1
No	3.0	8.4	3.7	2.5	7.5	1.4	.4	.0	3.1
No response*	13.4	16.8	13.6	14.4	6.3	8.5	13.1	11.2	12.7
Sample size	134	179	81	160	80	141	229	116	1120

*Individuals who do not consider themselves shy did not respond to this question.